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“A BARLEY CAKE” (EZEK 4:12a): SYNTAX AND REDACTION¹

ABSTRACT

Most commentators and translators have analysed Ezek 4:12a as a construction containing a pre-verbal noun phrase functioning as an adverbial: “And, as a barley cake, you shall eat it”. Most commentators have then argued that vv. 12-15 are a redactional extension of v. 9 or v. 10 – even though these verses contain no feminine antecedent for the pronominal suffix in v. 12a. In this essay, I argue that Ezek 4:12a should be analysed as a front (left) dislocation construction. Ezek 4:12-15 represents an independent symbolic act that has been redactionally inserted into the present context, and the function of the dislocation construction is to make the referent “barley cake” more highly available for cognitive processing.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Ezek 4:12, the prophet is told: **ועגת שערים תאכלנה והיא בגללי צאת האדם תעגנה לעיניהם**. In his commentary on Ezekiel, Zimmerli (1979:149) translates the first clause as “And, in the form of barley cakes you shall eat it”. According to Zimmerli, vv. 12-15 are “foreign to the original three-sign composition” and function as a redactional extension of v. 9.² He claims that the feminine object suffix on **תאכלנה** “you shall eat it” actually refers to the masculine noun **לחם** “bread” in v. 9 (or **מאכל** “food” in v. 10), but has been “inaccurately influenced” by the feminine noun **עגה** “cake” at the beginning of the clause (Zimmerli 1979:149). He therefore understands the noun phrase **עגת שערים** as an adverbial modifier. In the following essay, I will argue that this analysis of the syntax of and

1 I wish to thank R L Holmstedt, J R Westbury and the reviewers of *JNSL* for their helpful comments and suggestions. The opinions expressed in this paper (and any errors present) are my own.

2 Zimmerli (1979:170) states: “The addition of vv. 12-15 begins very skilfully with a closer interpretation of **ועשית ללחם** of v 9, taking up the **תאכלנו** ... It is slightly changed to the form **תאכלנה**”. The three “original” symbolic acts that Zimmerli isolates (1979:155-156) are the model city described in Ezek 4:1-3, the siege food in 4:9-11 and the head-shaving in 5:1-2. Different compositional models for Ezek 4-5 are presented in Herrmann (1908:12) and Allen (1994:55, 57, 70-71), but, like Zimmerli, they too posit a connection between Ezek 4:12a and v. 9 (or, in Allen’s case, v. 10).

redactional motives behind v. 12 is incorrect. The noun phrase “cake of barley” should be understood as an instance of dislocation rather than as an adverbial modifier, and vv. 12-15 should be taken as a case of redactional interpolation into vv. 9-17 rather than as a redactional extension of v. 9.

2. EARLIER ANALYSES

Zimmerli was hardly the first – or the last – to analyse Ezek 4:12a in this manner. The vast majority of commentators on Ezekiel treat the noun phrase עֶגֶת שְׂעִירִים as an adverbial modifier (“*as a cake of barley* you shall eat it”), and understand v. 12a to be referring to the “bread” of v. 9.³ Cornill and Eichrodt even rearrange the text to support this understanding, placing v. 12 directly after v. 9 in their translations. Similarly, most Bible translations reflect the analysis of “cake of barley” as an adverbial modifier (e.g., CEB; Zürcher Bibel; La Bible du Semeur; Schlachter Bibel; NRSV; JPS Tanakh; NIV; NAS; RSV; KJV).⁴ This understanding of the syntax of v. 12 is attested as far back as the Vulgate, which reads *et quasi subcinericiū hordiaciū comedēs illud*, “and as barley-bread baked under ashes you shall eat it”.

The construction in which a noun phrase functioning as an adverbial modifier is placed before a finite verb with an object suffix is well-attested in Biblical Hebrew. Compare Exod 12:14c חֻקַּת עוֹלָם תַּחֲגִּהוּ, “[*as*] a perpetual statute you shall celebrate it”, where the antecedent of the object suffix is the preceding masculine noun יוֹם “day”; or Ezek 5:1b לָךְ תִּקַּח הַחֶרֶב תִּקְחֶנָּה, “[*as*] the razor of a barber you shall take it for yourself”, where the antecedent of the object suffix is the preceding feminine noun חֶרֶב “sword”. Hebrew grammars traditionally refer to this use of a noun phrase as an “adverbial accusative”.⁵

3 Odell (2005:64); Darr (2001:1149); Pohlmann (1996:78, 93); Allen (1994:47, 51, 69; he links v. 12a to the “food” in v. 10); Eichrodt (1970:78, 86); Fohrer (1955:31); Cooke (1936:55, 64); Herrmann (1908:12; 1924:28); Kraetzschmar (1900:52; though note his proposed emendation, 50); Bertholet (1897:27-28); Cornill (1886:197); Keil (1882:73); Smend (1880:32).

4 Exceptions are the New American Bible Revised Edition (2011), the Louis Second Bible (1910), and the older and newer versions of the Luther Bibel (1545; 1984).

5 See the discussion and examples in Gesenius (1910:372-376; esp. 374-375); Joüon & Muraoka (2005:455-459); Waltke & O’Connor (1990:169-173). Allen (1994:51) labels the noun phrase in Ezek 4:12a “appositional”, but this label

But if Ezek 4:12a contains an adverbial, what is its function? What would it mean to eat something “*as* a cake of barley”? Medieval Jewish commentators had ready answers to this question. For Rashi, it referred to the manner of preparation and the resulting appearance: cakes made of wheat had a pleasant appearance, but cakes of barley had an ugly appearance. For Kimhi, it referred to the manner of eating. Ezekiel was to eat the multigrain bread of v. 9 as if it were made of barley alone, for according to Kimhi, multigrain bread is more difficult to eat than bread made out of a single ingredient.⁶ But for most interpreters, “*as* a cake of barley” referred to the method of cooking – in the ashes of a fire or on hot stones, rather than in an oven.⁷ This interpretation of v. 12a is very old, and can be found in the Vulgate (*et quasi subcinericiu hordiaciu comedes illud*), which explicitly refers to bread baked in ashes.

There are, however, serious problems with understanding ועגת שערים תאכלנה as “you shall eat it *as* a cake of barley”. First, the verb “you shall eat” would seem to preclude an understanding of this clause as a reference to the manner of preparation (a reference which, as we noted above, is a result of the fact that most readers have taken “barley cake” as an adverbial). This is confirmed by Toy’s attempt to evade the problem by suggesting that the verb itself be changed: “עשה is the appropriate verb, as in v. 15 (though אכל is possible). Read תעשינה” (Toy 1899:48).⁸

Second, the feminine object suffix on תאכלנה “you shall eat it” cannot be referring to the earlier nouns לחם “bread” (v. 9) or מאכל “food” (v. 10), both of which are masculine.⁹ As we noted above, Zimmerli (1979:149) attempted to overcome this difficulty by claiming that the verb in v. 12a

matches neither his translation nor the usual definition of apposition (see Waltke & O’Connor 1990:70).

6 For the commentaries of Rashi and Kimhi, see Cohen (2000:24).

7 Zimmerli (1979:170): “as a barley cake, i.e., to treat its preparation as for a barley cake”. So also Keil (1882:73); Cooke (1936:55, 64); Allen (1994:69), all citing 1 Kgs 19:6.

8 Kraetzschmar (1900:50, 52) proposes an emendation of v. 12a (“Und den ‘scheusslichen’ Brotfladen – den sollst du essen,” reading ועגת שערים), which he places directly after v. 9. He says, however, that if the noun phrase in MT is to be retained, one should emend the verb (following Toy), and he assumes the result to be adverbial (“als Gerstenfladen”).

9 Nor can it refer to the list of ingredients in v. 9, which is how the Septuagint (καὶ ἐγκρυφίαν κρίθινον φάγεσαι αὐτά; note the neuter plural accusative pronoun) understands it; cf., Olley (2009:262).

originally had a masculine suffix, and that it was “inaccurately influenced” by the preceding feminine noun עֵגֶה “cake”.¹⁰ There do seem to be a few instances in Biblical Hebrew where a pronoun does not agree with the gender of its antecedent. But these are instances of independent pronouns, not suffixed object pronouns; and they are influenced by the gender of a *following* noun, not a preceding one.¹¹ In any case, these examples are beside the point, because there is nothing ungrammatical with the text as it stands. It seems likely that Zimmerli considered the text “inaccurate” because it could not be easily fit into his reconstruction of the motives of the editor of Ezek 4-5.

Some commentators reconstruct the compositional history of Ezek 4 differently from Zimmerli, and have taken v. 12a as the original continuation of v. 9 or v. 10 (rather than as a redactional extension).¹² It is difficult to tell whether their reading of v. 12a as containing an adverbial construction has led them to take v. 12a with v. 9 as part of a single (or two-stage) sign act, or whether their reconstruction of vv. 9ff. as being fundamentally about a siege (with references to exile being later interpolations) has led them to understand “cake of barley” as an adverbial and the feminine object suffix to refer to a masculine noun. Whatever the case, the syntax of v. 12 cannot be construed in such a way that it supports this model of composition. The earlier use of *masculine* object suffixes to refer to the antecedents “bread” (cf. v. 9, תֹּאכְלֶנּוּ) and “food” (cf. v. 10, תֹּאכְלֶנּוּ) confirms this. Moreover, the feminine object suffix of v. 12a is continued with feminine pronominal forms in v. 12b. One might object

10 Cf., Ehrlich (1912:16): “Das Suff. in תֹּאכְלֶנּוּ bezieht sich eigentlich auf מֵאֲכָלָךְ in V.10, stimmt aber im Genus mit dem ihm nähern עֵגֶת שְׂעִירִים überein, das Prädikatsnomen ist”. Cf., also Allen (1994:51).

11 Joüon & Muraoka (2005:551) lists as examples Lev 25:33 (where הוּא should refer to עֵרֵי הַלְוִיִּם but is apparently influenced by the following אֲחֻזָּתָם) and Jer 10:3 (where הוּא should refer to חֲקוֹת הָעַמִּים but is apparently influenced by the following עֵץ). For other examples of incongruence due to attraction, see Levi (1987:125-140). Keil (1882:73) wants to take the feminine suffix as a “neuter” referring back to the masculine noun “bread” (or its ingredients) in v. 9. But as Joüon & Muraoka (2005:558) note, a feminine pronoun is used in this way only when the thing referred to is vague, not concrete.

12 Cf., Cornill (1886:197); Bertholet (1897:27); Kraetzschmar (1900:52); Herrmann (1908:12, though he sees the phrase “barley cake” as a later interpolation); Cooke (1936:49-50, 55); Eichrodt (1970:78); Allen (1994:47, 55, 57, 70-71); and Darr (2001:1149).

that the occurrence of the word **לחם** in v. 15 supports a reading of the text that takes vv. 12-15 as a continuation of v. 9. But the use of **לחם** in v. 15 is motivated by its use as a general term for food in v. 13. The symbolic act of eating unclean food and the reality it depicts are merging together.¹³

There is an alternative to the compositional models described thus far. If we consider Ezek 4:12-15 to be an *independent* symbolic act that has been inserted into its present context, rather than considering it as an *extension* of the symbolic act in Ezek 4:9-11, then the assessment of the text’s syntax as “inaccurate” and the hypothetical reconstruction of an originally masculine pronominal suffix is unnecessary.¹⁴ Ironically, if Zimmerli’s reconstruction of the three symbolic acts in Ezek 4:1-3, 9-11 and 5:1-2 as the earliest layer is correct, then it favours the likelihood that Ezek 4:12-15 is an independent symbolic act. The model city under siege, the siege food, and the head-shaving all refer to the fate of Jerusalem and its inhabitants, and proceed in chronological order from attack to siege conditions to complete destruction of the city’s inhabitants (cf. Ezek 5:12). But Ezek 4:12-13 evinces a different outlook: it acknowledges that there *were* survivors of the attack on Jerusalem, survivors who have been exiled to other countries.¹⁵ The symbolic act of eating unclean food in other countries (Ezek 4:12-15) has been inserted between the command to perform the symbolic act of eating siege food (Ezek 4:9-11) and its interpretation (vv. 16-17), most likely because of the shared key word “eat” (vv. 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16). That it appears at all in the broader context of material in chaps. 4-5 is due to an editorial desire to bring together various sign acts about judgment.

13 The word **לחם** can be used to refer to “food” in a broad sense (as in v. 13) but also to a specific kind of food (as in v. 15); the latter occurrence refers to the “cake of barley” (v. 12).

14 See, for example, Hölscher (1924:61): “Mit 4₁₂₋₁₅ ist 4_{9a} nicht zusammenzunehmen, wie Herrmann will; denn 4_{9a} redet vom Mischbrod, 4₁₂ von Gerstenkuchen (nicht ‘wie Gerstenkuchen’);” and Wevers (1969:56): “Food during the exile will be unclean. That it was not part of verses 9a, 10-11 is clear from the designation *barley cake*”. So also Greenberg (1983:118-119; he suggests that vv. 12-15 is connected with v. 6); Block (1997:185); and Kasher (2004:201).

15 The distinction in referent between Ezek 4:9-11 (which concerns the citizens of Jerusalem) and Ezek 4:12-15 (which concerns survivors in exile) was even noted by John Calvin in his commentary on Ezekiel, published posthumously in French translation in 1565; see Calvin (1948:182-185).

3. EZEKIEL 4:12a AS A DISLOCATION CONSTRUCTION

Only a few commentators have analysed the noun phrase עגת שערים as something other than an adverbial.¹⁶ Of these, Greenberg, Block, and Friebe treat “cake of barley” under the rubric of *casus pendens*. Recent scholarship, however, has rejected this label in favour of more precise terminology.¹⁷ Ezek 4:12a should, therefore, be classified as a case of front dislocation (typically, “left dislocation” – at least for languages whose scripts run left-to-right).¹⁸ This construction occurs when a noun phrase is placed outside and in front of the clause, but is still related to it by means of a resumptive element within the clause.¹⁹ There are in fact two instances of front dislocation in Ezek 4:12:

ועגת שערים תאכלנה

והיא בגללי צאת האדם תעגנה לעיניהם

And a cake of barley – you shall eat it;

and it – on turds of human excrement you shall bake it in their sight.

16 Calvin (1889:114) translates v. 12a as *et placentam hordeorum (hoc est hordeaceam) comedes*: “And you shall eat a cake of barley (i.e., made of barley)”. See also Buzy (1923:190); Hölscher (1924:61); Greenberg (1983:107); Block (1997:181). Cf. also Friebe (1999:248, n.384), who cites Greenberg and Buzy.

17 Naudé notes that the term *casus pendens* is inappropriate because Biblical Hebrew lacks a functional case system and because the dislocated noun phrase is not “hanging”, but joined to a clause by a resumptive. For this point and for a critique of the inadequacies of older studies, see Naudé (1990:116-120).

18 So Khan (1988:84), though he labels the two instances of dislocation in Ezek 4:12ab as “extraposition”. Khan also classifies v. 12a as an example where dislocation “marks” the “closure of a speech or poem” (see his discussion of “span closure”; 1988:83-86). But does dislocation “mark” closure, or simply coincide with it in some cases? And is v. 12 really the “end of a speech”? Gross’s important compilation of examples includes only the second clause (Ezek 4:12b) and not the first; see Gross (1987:24-25, 32).

19 For formal descriptions of front/left dislocation and its differentiation from other constructions, see Moshavi (2010:81-83); Westbury (2010:83-90, 100-101); Lambrecht (2001:1050-1072); Naudé (1990:115, 120-128); Foley & Van Valin (1985:355-358).

In this case, the departure from normal word order is pragmatically motivated.²⁰ After all, the author could have described a command to eat without the use of this construction, as he does in, e.g., Ezek 12:18 and 24:17. Cross-linguistic research has demonstrated that the use of front/left dislocation is related to how information is structured in the communication process. There is a growing consensus that its function is to bring the referent represented by the dislocated constituent to the forefront of consciousness to increase efficiency in cognitive processing.²¹ For example, the dislocated noun phrase “son of the female slave” in Gen 21:13 (וגם את־בן־האמה לגוי אשימנו) can be described as a “re-activation” of the referent that was mentioned earlier (v. 10ff.), before the intervening comments about Sarah and Isaac in v. 12b.²² In the case of Ezek 4:12a, front dislocation signals the activation of a referent that was not mentioned earlier.²³ It should be noted that the use of this construction is optional, not required.²⁴

20 There may be some instances in which front dislocation is syntactically motivated, particularly in cases where the dislocated constituent is a lengthy noun phrase; see, e.g., Gen 24:7; 1 Kgs 15:23.

21 Van der Merwe & Talstra (2002/2003:86); Van der Merwe, Naudé & Kroeze (1999:339); Lambrecht (1994:182-183; cf. 93-101 on accessibility and referent activation); Foley & Van Valin (1985:356).

22 See a similar example in Lev 7:30, where the front-dislocated constituent “the fat with the breast” in את־החלב עליהחזה יביאנו is a re-activation of the referent mentioned earlier in v. 25.

23 Note a similar occurrence of dislocation at the beginning of a new text-segment in Isa 27:2. Both Ezek 4.12a and Isa 27:2 are similar in another way: in each case, the dislocated noun phrase is indefinite. This is uncommon, probably because the referent of a left-dislocated noun phrase has typically been mentioned earlier and is being re-activated by the dislocation construction. Other examples of indefinite left-dislocated noun phrases can be found in Jer 49:21b; Prov 11:26a; 30:17 (see also conditional clause constructions such as Lev 13:29; Num 5:12; Ezek 33:2).

24 Chafe’s description of concepts as “active”, “semi-active” or “inactive” (1987:22ff.; mentioned in Lambrecht 1994:182-183 to describe how left dislocation makes a referent “active”) is useful, but cannot be applied mechanistically. Note the case of Gen 49:1-28, where out of twelve sons listed in the poem, only Reuben (v. 3), Judah (v. 8), Gad (v. 19), and Asher (v. 20; the versions suggest the *mem* of מאשר in MT belongs on the preceding word, reading עקבם) are introduced with front/left dislocation. While these four

There are two further issues that merit discussion, the first of which has to do with the availability of the entity referred to by the front-dislocated constituent for cognitive processing. Some statements in the literature might suggest that front/left dislocation can only be employed if the entity referred to by the dislocated constituent is not “new”.²⁵ In the case of Ezek 4:12a, a “cake of barley” has not previously been mentioned. How then can it be available for cognitive processing?

More precise descriptions of front/left dislocation recognize that the entity referred to by the dislocated constituent need not be previously mentioned, but may simply be “identifiable” or “inferable”. As Gregory & Michaelis (2001:1670) note, “the referents of preclausal NPs in LD are rarely ‘new’ in the sense of being unfamiliar or unidentifiable, but are typically at least identifiable ... discourse-new status cannot be equated with a particular givenness, activation, or familiarity status”.²⁶ A good example of the distinction drawn by Gregory & Michaelis may be seen in, e.g., Gen 17:15 (שרי אשתך לא־תקרא את־שמה שרי), where the entity represented by the front-dislocated constituent “Sarai your wife” is discourse-new (not having been mentioned earlier in the conversation depicted in Gen 17), but is obviously known to the addressee Abraham.²⁷

More significant for our example in Ezekiel is the fact that an assertion about a newly-mentioned entity may be linked via the front-dislocated constituent to an existing cognitive frame or schema. As Van der Merwe & Wendland (2010:113) point out, “many topic entities are identifiable because they are either linked to other discourse active entities and/or part of the presupposed scripts and frames invoked by means of those

referents are thereby distinguished, it is difficult to see why these four (as opposed to the others) were chosen, or how this relates meaningfully to any communication strategies present in the broader context.

25 E.g., Lambrecht (1994:184): “brand-new referents may not occur in detachment constructions”.

26 Note that in a later essay Lambrecht (2001:1074) acknowledges that the referent of the left-dislocated constituent need not be “overtly established” but may be “inferable as a potential topic” via an existing semantic frame. Cf., Van der Merwe & Talstra (2002/2003:86), who describe the referent of a left-dislocated constituent as “identifiable, but non-active.” Likewise, Van der Merwe, Naudé & Kroeze (1999:339) speak of “(re-)activat[ing] an identifiable referent”.

27 See Westbury (2010:117-118) for further analysis of this example.

entities”.²⁸ In the case of Ezek 4:12a, the “cake of barley” has not been previously mentioned (which stands to reason, if vv. 12-15 are a redactional insertion), but is easily accessible because it is embedded in a context with repeated references to “eating” (Ezek 4:9, 10, 16). This is similar to Exod 15:15b (אֵלֵי מוֹאָב יֵאָחֲזֻמוּ רָעַד), in which the dislocated constituent “leaders of Moab” refers to a newly-mentioned entity, but where the schema already evoked (vv. 14, 15a) is that of “surrounding foreign nations in a state of fear”.²⁹

With respect to how Ezek 4:12 relates to the surrounding context, we might speculate further. It could be the case that the dislocated constituent “cake of barley” was placed outside the clause boundary of Ezek 4:12a so as to further individuate the referent of this constituent in relation to other things in context which are described as to be eaten (v. 9, “bread”; v. 10, “food”). If so, then we may have an example of what Prince (1998:288) calls a “poset left-dislocation”: that is, a left dislocation which “serves to trigger an inference on the part of the hearer that the entity represented by the initial NP stands in a salient partially-ordered set relation to some entity or entities already evoked in the discourse-model”.

The second issue that must be addressed concerns the two levels at which front dislocation can be analysed. One might inquire why I am not using the categories of “topic” and “comment” (as some recent studies on information structure and word order have done) to analyse Ezek 4:12. For example, Lambrecht has discussed how information is presented at the clausal level using the notion of “topic”: “There is a general consensus in the literature on dislocation that LD and RD are topic-marking constructions, i.e. grammatical constructions which serve to mark a constituent as denoting the topic (or theme) with respect to which a given

28 See also Lambrecht (1994:99-100) for his categories “textually accessible”, “inferentially accessible” and “situationally accessible”, as well as example #124 in Lambrecht (2001:1074). On the notion of a schema, see Chafe (1987:29): “A schema is usefully regarded as a cluster of interrelated expectations. When a schema has been evoked in a narrative, some if not all of the expectations of which it is constituted presumably enter the semi-active state. From that point on, they are more readily available to recall than they would have been as inactive concepts”. On the notion of cognitive frames, see Fillmore (1982:111-137).

29 For other examples, see Ezek 7:15b; 38:2a; Job 38:32b.

sentence expresses a relevant comment” (Lambrecht 2001:1072).³⁰ Van der Merwe, Naudé & Kroeze (1999:249) give a similar description of left dislocation: “This dislocated constituent often refers to the matter which the clause is about”. Other studies of word order and information structure in Biblical Hebrew use the term “topic” as well, though sometimes in notably different ways.³¹

Prince (1998:281-302), however, has argued that the function of left-dislocation structures cannot be reduced to marking a “topic” about which the rest of the clause expresses a proposition. She demonstrates that these constructions have a variety of functions at a higher level of discourse than just the individual clause.³² Gundel & Fretheim (2006:185) go so far as to claim that “there is no simple one-to-one correlation between topic or focus and particular syntactic constructions, either across languages or even within particular languages ... non-canonical placement of constituents in sentence-initial position is not in itself uniquely associated with either topic or focus”. Likewise, in various publications Van der Merwe and his co-authors distinguish how information is presented in the clause and the idea of cognitive activation in a larger unit of discourse; e.g.: “a distinction must be made between, on the one hand, presupposed propositions and identifiable entities that constitute their knowledge, and, on the other hand, the discourse activeness of those propositions and entities at a particular point of the communication process” (Van der Merwe & Talstra 2002/2003:77). This explains their other descriptions of front dislocation in which it is clear that – even if they do use the term “topic” – they are referring to cognitive activation at the discourse level.³³

30 Lambrecht (1994:118) defines “topic” as follows: “The topic of a sentence is the thing which the proposition expressed by the sentence is about”.

31 See Moshavi (2010:32-47) for an overview of how “topic” and “focus” have been used in the study of Biblical Hebrew clause structure. For example, Holmstedt (2009:127, 128) uses the four categories of topic, focus, theme, and rheme, but does not define “topic” in terms of “aboutness”. See now the more extensive treatment of edge constituents in Holmstedt (2014).

32 The distinction between information presentation at the clausal level and the function of cognitive activation in the larger discourse is suggested in Lambrecht (1994:160, 162).

33 See Van der Merwe, Naudé & Kroeze (1999:339), “the function of the above type of dislocated construction is usually to (re-)activate an identifiable referent that is talked about”; and Van der Merwe & Talstra (2002/2003:86), “In verbal and nominal clauses pendens constructions establish (promote) identifiable, but

So while word order and information structure at the clause level remain a fruitful area for investigation, the function of left-dislocation structures must also be analysed at the larger discourse level.

4. CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have argued that Ezek 4:12-15 is an independent symbolic act report about eating unclean food in exile. Nevertheless, it has been shaped for insertion into its present context between Ezek 4:9-11 (the symbolic act about eating siege food) and 4:16-17 (the interpretation of this symbolic act). The “cake of barley” (Ezek 4:12a) is not to be taken as an adverbial specifying the manner in which the mixed grain bread of v. 9 is to be prepared, nor does the feminine suffix on “you shall eat it” (v. 12) refer back to the masculine nouns “bread” (v. 9) or “food” (v. 10). Instead, v. 12 should be analysed as an instance of front dislocation. Its function is to introduce a referent not previously mentioned (“cake of barley”) into a context about eating food, simultaneously maintaining some degree of textual cohesion, yet individuating the referent from other things which are eaten and making that referent more highly available for cognitive processing.

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